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British Academy in Turmoil Over the Blunt Case

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LONDON, Aug. 23 — The British Academy, normally a discreet and reserved association of scholars, has been in turmoil for weeks over the case of Anthony Blunt, the distinguished and much-honored art historian who was exposed last fall as a spy for the Russians in World War II.

Mr. Blunt, who was Sir Anthony before Buckingham Palace stripped him of his knighthood, resigned from the academy under great pressure on Monday, saying that the decision "seemed to me the only

way by which I could lessen the dissension which my continued membership has hitherto caused."

Even after that the dissension continued in the academy, one of the world's most illustrious scholarly societies. One side bitterly accuses the other of hounding the 72-year-old Mr. Blunt unfairly, and the other side responds, in the words of one scholar, that "dealing with a traitor is always distasteful."

The day after Mr. Blunt reluctantly resigned the historian A. J. P. Taylor also quit, in protest against what he termed the witch hunt conducted against Mr. Blunt, a former curator of Queen Elizabeth's art collection.

"It's none of our business, as a group of scholars, to consider matters of this sort," Mr. Taylor explained in an interview. "It was a legal offense that the man committed and it was up to the legal authorities to prosecute him if they cared to. The academy's only concern should be his scholarly credentials, which are unaffected by all this."

Prof. Richard S. Cobb, a historian and fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, who shares Mr. Taylor's view, also resigned, and other members of the academy were said to be considering joining the protest.

Although the academy voted last month not to expel Mr. Blunt, despite his admitted involvement in the notorious Burgess-Maclean spy case, several members had already resigned to protest his continued membership. When their side finally won this week members opposed to Mr. Blunt expressed gratification that he was out, accusing his defenders of being unrealistic.

"The position of Taylor and the others is absurd," said J. H. Plumb, a Cambridge historian who was a leader in the faction opposed to Mr. Blunt's continued membership. "Like so many intellectuals

they are very weak in judgment. No one is attacking Mr. Blunt's opinions, or even suggesting that we cannot have Marxists in the academy. But this man's a traitor. We are judging his actions, not his opinions."

Other critics of Mr. Blunt said that the determination of some of his colleagues to protect him was another example of the British Establishment's taking care of its own, a charge that has clung to the Blunt case since the first disclosures of his actions in November.

Because the Government secretly granted him immunity after his confession in 1964, he cannot be prosecuted for espionage despite the assertion by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that what he did "seriously damaged" British interests.

Mr. Blunt was persuaded in November to give up his honorary fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge. But in February London University decided, after a heated debate, not to take away his title of professor emeritus.

Two months ago, in another important bit of academic symbolism, he was asked to review a book for The Times Literary Supplement, for the first time since his disgrace. "He was asked because he is indisputably the most knowledgeable academic on French 18th-century architecture," an editor explained. "The other side of him was considered irrelevant."